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SUBJECT: ILO COMMISSION GAINS TRIPARTITE PERSPECTIVES IN COLOMBIA

REF: A. GENEVA 1578  
IB. BOGOTA 6746

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SUMMARY  
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I11. A high-level International Labor Organization (ILO) commission visited Colombia November 25-28 to encourage progress on implementation on the June 2006 Tripartite Agreement (ref A). The commission released its report--which the local ILO report called positive--to the GOC, unions, and employers on December 13, but will not make it public. Colombia's main labor groups told the commission the GOC has made progress in protecting labor leaders and prosecuting cases of violence against unionists--the first time the confederations have acknowledged such progress--but said more should be done to ensure workers' rights. The unions proposed an eleven point agenda--which was accepted by the GOC and business community--that will provide the basis for discussions on a roadmap for progress on labor issues. END SUMMARY.

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COMMISSION PROMOTES DIALOGUE AMONGST TRIPARTITE GROUPS  
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I12. At the GOC's invitation, a high-level ILO commission visited Colombia November 25-28 to meet with GOC officials, labor leaders, and industry representatives to encourage progress in implementing the June 2006 Tripartite Agreement on labor issues. The GOC invited the commission to visit during the annual ILO meetings in Geneva last June. The commission underscored the importance of dialogue among workers, employers and the GOC. It did not try to determine whether the parties were complying with their commitments under the agreement.

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HIGH-LEVEL REPS ELEVATE PROFILE OF LABOR DISCUSSIONS  
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I13. The ILO's resident representative in Colombia, Marcelo Castro Fox, said the visit was intended to raise the profile of discussion of labor issues. The commission provided its trip report to the GOC, unions, and employers on December 13, but will not make it public. Local ILO representative Marcelo Castro Fox said he would provide Post with a copy which we will forward to WHA/AND, and noted that the Colombians were free to release the report to the public.

Commission members included Jean Maninat, Director of the ILO's regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean; Jose Luis Dasa, Director of the Sub-regional office for Andean Countries; Ricardo Hernandez Pulido, Director of the ILO's Department of Services, Relations, Meetings, and Documents; Karen Curtis, Deputy Director of the Department of International Workplace Norms; and Martha Travieso, officer in the Norms Department

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GOC OUTLINES PROGRESS ON LABOR  
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14. Vice Minister of Labor Andres Palacios said the GOC appreciated the commission's visit as an opportunity to show GOC progress in implementing the agreement. He cited the increase in prosecution of violence against labor unionists and said the Ministry of Interior and Justice's protection program had protected over 1,720 unionists in 2007. Palacio said the GOC provided \$2.2 million to the ILO in October for the four projects agreed to in the tripartite agreement, enabling work to begin on employment generation for women, youth, and the displaced, as well as promoting social dialogue among the tripartite groups. The commission also met with the Inspector General, Supreme and Constitutional Courts, Human Rights Ombudsman, Prosecutor General, Vice Minister of Justice, National Police, Department of Administrative Security (DAS), and the Vice President.

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UNIONS RECOGNIZE PROGRESS  
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15. Colombia's three major labor confederations, the United Confederation of Workers (CUT), the Confederation of Colombian Workers (CTC), and the General Confederation of Workers (CGT), along with the confederation of retired citizens (CPC), welcomed the commission's visit and used it as a vehicle to present their proposals for implementing the tripartite agreement to the GOC. The unions proposed eleven themes to include in a "road-map" for implementation of the tripartite agreement. Castro Fox said all three parties were amenable to using these points as the basis for starting discussion. The tripartite group committed to meeting monthly to discuss next steps.

16. Castro Fox told us that in their meeting with the commission, Colombia's labor confederations recognized GOC progress in protecting labor leaders and in prosecuting cases of violence against unionists. The ILO and GOC considered this an important step in improving relations with the unions, noting that this was the first time the confederations had acknowledged such progress. Castro Fox told us that, with the exception of the violence issues, the workplace issues in Colombia--collective bargaining, workers' cooperatives, and promoting the right to organize--are the same as in other countries in the region. As the GOC makes progress on protection and prosecution, Castro said Colombia's labor regime should be judged in the same terms as those of other Latin countries.

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EMPLOYERS WILLING TO CONTINUE DIALOGUE  
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17. Alberto Echavarria, Vice President of the National Association of Industries (ANDI), characterized the commission's visit as positive. He reviewed progress made by employers in promoting the right to organize and in complying with legal obligations on salaries, benefits, and contracts. ANDI's proposals include supporting prosecutions and protection, as well as involving the ILO's representative in Colombia in informal efforts to resolve labor disputes.